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Mr. Murray Elston,
Minister of Health,
Toronto, Ontario.

4 August 1986

Dear Mr. Elston,

I will be glad to receive your answers to the many questions I've asked.

I have no doubt that someday (the apparently not too bright) staff in your ministry will realize what many of us have known for some time: people with environmental hypersensitivity are like the birch trees in an acid rain forest, in that we are the first to show the effects of a variety of chemicals, singly and in combination, which have been newly introduced into our ecosystem.

The symptoms take a variety of forms, depending on other ecological and host factors, and the confusion that has surrounded our illness, (to which Dr. Zimmerman has made significant contribution), has resulted in a history similar to that of the history of coming to an understanding of the effects of acid rain. The only differences are that: 1) in our case people are affected rather than trees, and 2) the chemical bath for trees is premixed.

As you must know, with acid rain, a group of environmentally aware biologists discovered that trees are susceptible to a wide variety of illnesses as a result of the alteration of their ecosystem by the introduction of acid rain, (acid rain being not just H_2SO_4 pollution, but including a wide variety of new pollutants, similar to those humans are newly exposed to in our altered ecosystem). Opponents of the altered ecosystem explanation have grasped desperately to various other hypotheses in an effort to evade the truth. Worms have been blamed, soil conditions, parasites, bacteria, and other diseases. The trees' 'immune system' has even been blamed in some quarters. It has taken the environmentalists a couple of decades to get through to the authorities what the problems are really caused by.

Trees in an acid rain forest are susceptible to a wide variety of problems because the pollution has affected various systems in the tree, making it susceptible to a wide variety of adverse influences. The fact that the trees' immune system has not been able to keep up is irrelevant.

In the case of the environmentally sensitive, a group of doctors, (clinical ecologists and other environmental health specialists), have asserted that susceptible individuals have developed a variety of systemic problems as a result of pollution. Opponents of this group (including the slow-thinking staff of the Ministry of Health) have claimed that this is not proven, (despite thousands of diagnosed cases), and that this or that specific part of the problem is the real cause for concern, while, as is the case for our friends the trees, the general (and relevant) concern goes unaddressed.

Specialists have blamed, variously, candida albicans, the immune system, the mind, various viruses which are normally dormant but can become reactivated with changing host internal environment, and so on. While these specialists have been arguing with each other about who is 'right', the real problem has been left unaddressed. Of course, as Canadians have been trying to tell the American administration for several years, as long as the problem of pollution is not seen for what it is, the damage continues.

An informal survey turns up 15 thousand diagnoses in Ontario so far. Each of those affected have seen an average of six practitioners, probably many others have given up the search without discovering the cause of their symptoms.

As long as those looking into the situation characterize the illness as specific to one system, (by accepting an immunologist as head of the review of the Thomson Commission, for instance), the real problem of pollution, in all its legitimized forms, will continue to make thousands more sick.

If there has been action and citizen displeasure with dying lakes, dying people and miserable lives will bring orders of magnitude more concern, whether or not your government admits the real problem.

It is unfortunate the Minister of Health has sanctioned the appointment, to chair a review committee on a matter of public concern, of a man who has a demonstrated ignorance about clinical ecology and environmental hypersensitivity, and yet, is willing to express strong views on the subject, resulting in great cost to victims, potential victims, and legitimate practitioners. We are tired of your government demonstrating a lack of concern about the problems bigotry such as Dr. Zimmerman's has caused us.

Thank you,

Chris Brown
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cc Premier David Peterson
The Ombudsman
various environmental health organizations
various native associations
various immigrant associations
CMA
CLC and other labour organizations
health critics
environment minister and critics
human rights minister and critics